

OP-EDS

# THE LEFT NEEDS TO LEAVE TRUMP BEHIND ON TRADE

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*Tetris continues to make an enthralling case for removing trade barriers three decades after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Photo by Wolfgang Stief. Creative Commons CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.*

**“GOP Needs to Leave Trump Behind on Trade”** proclaimed the *Wall Street Journal* opinion page on October 3. The Cato Institute’s Jeb Hensarling offered “a refresher course on the dangers of protectionism” to Republicans who have yet to reckon with the economic losses stemming from Trump’s full-throated embrace of tariffs — or to reconcile their abandonment of Reagan’s free-trade rhetoric with talking points about “freedom of speech, free enterprise and the freedom to bear arms.”

I’m not holding my breath. The Bush administration’s foreign policy blunders haven’t impelled the GOP to rediscover the noninterventionism of its earlier Congressional leaders such as Robert Alphonso Taft Sr., Howard Homan Buffett and Mark Hatfield. (Hensarling cites Adam Smith’s “national-security excep-

tions to the free-trade rule,” making a concession to current Sinophobia. Hopefully a revived Adam Smith wouldn’t take exception to Tetris, dubbed “glasnost in a computer game” by *AMIGA Plus* magazine in 1989, as exemplary of the exchange across the Iron Curtain that thawed the Cold War.)

That conservatives would neglect their traditions worth preserving is at least understandable in the short-memory world of partisan politics. Far more puzzling is why the trade policies of the Trump Tower landlord live rent-free in the heads of those who purport to despise everything he stands for.

There have been some sharp jabs at Trump’s views on trade: During his first month in office, Vox’s “[Zero-sum Trump](#)” took a deep dive into Donald’s deep obliviousness to the gains from trade in markets with more room to grow than NYC’s tightly regulated real estate. Yet the issue barely registered in the contentious half-decade since.

Perhaps it was simply lost in the noise. Or the left-of-center may have gotten too used to demonizing Reagan to grasp the magnitude of the shift from “tear down this wall” to “build the wall.” Bernie Sanders [told](#) Vox that immigration freedom was “a right-wing proposal” which “would make everybody in America poorer” a month into Trump’s campaign.

Sanders should have taken a page from Noam Chomsky’s 2007 tome *What We Say Goes*, which observed that “Cuba and Venezuela are doing exactly what we were all taught we’re supposed to do in graduate courses in economics: they’re pursuing their comparative advantage.” Over a century earlier, Vilfredo Pareto had noted that “the workers of [England] enjoy much greater well-being than the workers of the European continent” due to free trade making food affordable, and Benjamin Tucker made a socialist case against “the tariff monopoly.”

At the end of George W. Bush’s first term, libertarian author James Bovard explained that “the notion of ‘free trade’ — but only with nationalities that American politicians bless — is a charade. This is like proclaiming freedom of the press, and then adding that people can buy books only from publishers specifically approved by the U.S. Congress.” How many election cycles will it take for American voters to see through the sham?

*New Yorker* Joel Schlosberg is a senior news analyst at The William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism.

## PUBLICATION/CITATION HISTORY

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